



Draft Memorandum of Understanding

For the

Marches Forward Partnership

Between

**Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council,
Powys County Council and Shropshire Council**

August 2023

Background:

Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Powys County Council, and Shropshire Council have been working collaboratively to develop a common understanding of each other's organisations. The aim has been to establish areas where there is mutual benefit and added value in working together, supporting each other's strategic aims and making the most of combined knowledge, resources and activities.

Geographically, the local authorities cover a contiguous area which straddles over 80% of the English and Welsh border. It is a wonderful area to live, work and visit and we have much to celebrate together. However, commuting patterns and access to retail, education, business support and healthcare services all reflect the functional profile of the area. The neighbouring local authorities are bound together by common purpose based on their rurality with longer and more expensive access to services, changing service demands from an ageing population and low levels of productivity and employment growth.

Whilst the local authorities have interacted as neighbouring areas on many levels for a long time, these activities had not previously been fully coordinated to align respective strategic visions, plans and resources for the maximum impact on the Marches and cross border area.

With an increased emphasis on the importance of place and local authorities in a system leadership role, and with the closure of the Marches LEP planned next year, this MOU formalises the strategic relationship between the Marches and cross border local authorities.

Purpose:



This MOU represents the spirit of co-operation and joint working between the local authorities. It is based on a shared set of principles around working together to raise the regional, national, and international profile of the Marches and cross border area with both Welsh and UK Government, businesses, and other key stakeholders.

The aim is to work together to maximise efficient service delivery, attract investment and positively impact the area and benefit local communities.

The local authorities do not intend this MoU to be legally binding. It is not intended that any formalised governing authority be created by this MoU.

Nothing in this MoU will seek to constrain the individual activities of each local authority or groupings of local authorities within the partnership. It is also not intended to duplicate existing partnership working by the constituent partners.

Objectives:

The MOU is set in the context of the climate emergency, economic uncertainty and drive for inclusive growth to level up communities and support Union Connectivity. It embodies the following agreed set of overarching principles:

- Providing a flexible umbrella framework for joint working
- Focusing on driving the best economic deal for the geography
- Delivering services that respond to how the area functions
- Unlocking additional value through harnessing the unique cross border location
- Developing a joint working approach to innovation
- Shaping and delivering outcomes for the best short, medium and long term future.
- Sharing learning and best practice with partners.

The focus of the collaboration is further defined by the following six objectives:

Objective 1: Data, Evidence and Research: Leveraging joint intelligence and research expertise to improve the quality of life for our rural, cross border communities through sharing information and carrying out research, with a particular focus on:

- Climate Change
- Transport and Connectivity
- Public health and inequalities
- Economic growth
- Data analysis and modelling to inform integrated policy-making and delivery between England and Wales based on a functional geography.

Objective 2: Nature, Energy and Climate Adaptation: Working together to identify and collaborate on strategic scale opportunities based around our high quality natural environment, addressing current and future resilience challenges in relation to climate change and nature recovery, with a particular focus on:



- Supporting rural resilience through bringing together thinking and work around land management
- Developing and unlocking climate and nature based investment opportunities
- Exploring common local authority aspirations around net zero and renewable energy solutions.

Objective 3: Transport and Digital Transformation: Working together to improve rural connectivity, to level up access to jobs, education and opportunity and bring mutual benefits for our neighbouring areas, with a particular focus on:

- Working together to establish a coherent, consistent and integrated bus network.
- Developing simplified cross border travel through integrated ticketing.
- Exploring opportunities with partners to increase frequency and speed of local rail provision.
- Developing cross area SMART collaboration opportunities to support shared social and economic outcomes.

Objective 4: Sustainable Communities: Working together on the development of sustainable communities, creating a social infrastructure offer which realises the growth and sustainability of the rural economy and supports our residents, employers and users of our geography, with a particular focus on:

- Understanding cross border movements to access health provision and the infrastructure needed to support this.
- Working collaboratively to provide cross border leadership for housing, including horizon scanning to identify future risks and opportunities and sharing information and good practice.
- Understanding and articulating the needs of existing and prospective employers to improve the ability for learning, skills and business support provision across borders to meet demands.

Objective 5: Food, Rural Development and Visitor Economy: Working together to identify opportunities for closer collaboration which encourages the economic growth of our rural economy, developing and promoting our unique offer, with a particular focus on:

- Supporting the development of key projects to attract investment, harnessing the power of shared assets, thematic propositions and strategic tourism routes.
- Working together to catalyse the realisation of key economic development sites, with strategic priority being to support market town regeneration.
- Establishing our value in food production supporting UK food sovereignty and agroecological practices, developing an enterprising and entrepreneurial culture which supports the development of sector based strategies and economic clusters.
- Working together to support a coherent cultural and visitor economy offer.

Objective 6: Government and Strategic Relations: Working together on strategic communications to raise the regional, national and international profile of our area, with a particular focus on:

- Joining up conversations with partners to support understanding and to work collaboratively on the promotion of activities and opportunities with key stakeholders.
- Where appropriate and in the interests of the area, agree key messages and a collective shared approach; noting that individual local authority positions will not always be aligned.
- Coordinating responses to jointly inform consultations, strategies and policies developed by others.

Management of MoU activity:

The Partnership will be coordinated through a Leaders Group bringing together the Leaders of each local authority on a quarterly basis.

An annual report will be prepared by the Leaders Group, setting out the progress made by the Marches Forward Partnership over the last year and identifying the priorities for the forthcoming 12 month.

The Leaders Group will be supported by officer groups comprising the Chief Executives and relevant Directors alongside working groups on particular focus areas.

Officer groups will operate on a monthly basis to support the Leaders in driving forward the programme of joint work.

Joint management and delivery structure





The local authorities also agree that:

- LA Leaders will respond to and progress work within this MoU, with each Local Authority taking individual responsibility for relevant Cabinet and Council briefings, as needed, to update on progress and ensure widespread support for this work.
- this MoU will run for an 18 month term before review;
- the broader activity of the Partnership may evolve and expand during implementation and will be reflected in subsequent reviews;
- nothing in this MoU will be interpreted as a commitment of funds from each local authority; and
- this MoU does not restrict, in any way, other arrangements that a local authority may wish to develop independently.

Signed by:

Date:

DRAFT